

A Black's Journey on the Amazon: The Career of Captain Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro (1862-1900)

Trajetória negra no Amazonas: A Carreira do Capitão Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro (1862-1900)

Geisimara Soares Matos^{a,®}, John Schulz^b

^a Doctoral candidate at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

^b President of the Instituto Lima Barreto. Email: john@institutolb.org

@ Contato principal: geisimara.soaresmatos@gmail.com

Abstract

When Marshal Floriano Peixoto assumed the presidency of Brazil in 1891, he appointed nine military officers to implement his reformist agenda and govern states, all but one in the North and Northeast of Brazil. The governor of Amazonas, Captain Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro left an enormous legacy that included the opera house of Manaus, built over a decade before the one in Rio de Janeiro. He drained the swamps and left Manaus a planned city while eradicating yellow fever, again a decade earlier than the national capital. In his four years, he greatly expanded the primary school network in his state while taking measures to encourage industry and immigration. Favored by the rubber boom and the export tax on this product, Ribeiro realized all these programs while balancing the state budget. Although still poorly known, Ribeiro must number among the most prolific state administrators of his time. Ribeiro was black. Our objective in preparing this article is to demonstrate how high a black could rise in nineteenth century Brazil and to demonstrate how much a motivated follower of President Floriano Peixoto could achieve as the governor of a state.

Keywords: science | technology | innovation

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Resumo

Quando o Marechal Floriano Peixoto assumiu a presidência do Brasil em 1891, nomeou nove oficiais militares para implementar sua agenda reformista e governar os estados, com exceção de um, todos localizados no Norte e Nordeste do país. O governador do Amazonas, Capitão Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro, deixou um enorme legado que incluía o teatro de ópera de Manaus, construído mais de uma década antes do de Rio de Janeiro. Ele drenou os pântanos e transformou Manaus em uma cidade planejada, erradicando a febre amarela, novamente uma década antes da capital nacional. Em seus quatro anos de governo, ele expandiu significativamente a rede de escolas primárias em seu estado, além de tomar medidas para incentivar a indústria e a imigração. Favorecido pelo boom da borracha e pelo imposto de exportação sobre esse produto, Ribeiro realizou todos esses programas enquanto equilibrava o orçamento do estado. Embora ainda pouco conhecido, Ribeiro deve ser contado entre os administradores estaduais mais prolíficos de sua época. Ribeiro era negro. Nosso objetivo ao preparar este artigo é demonstrar até onde um negro poderia ascender no Brasil do século XIX e mostrar o quanto um seguidor motivado do Presidente Floriano Peixoto poderia alcançar como governador de um estado.

Palavras-chave: ciência | tecnologia | inovação

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Resumen

Cuando el Mariscal Floriano Peixoto asumió la presidencia de Brasil en 1891, nombró a nueve oficiales militares para implementar su agenda reformista y gobernar los estados, con excepción de uno, todos ubicados en el Norte y Nordeste del país. El gobernador de Amazonas, el Capitán Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro, dejó un enorme legado que incluyó el teatro de ópera de Manaus, construido más de una década antes que el de Río de Janeiro. Él drenó los pantanos y convirtió a Manaus en una ciudad planificada, erradicando la fiebre amarilla, también una década antes que la capital nacional. En sus cuatro años de mandato, expandió enormemente la red de escuelas primarias en su estado, al mismo tiempo que tomó medidas para fomentar la industria y la inmigración. Favorecido por el auge del caucho y el impuesto de exportación de este producto, Ribeiro llevó a cabo todos estos programas mientras equilibraba el presupuesto estatal. Aunque todavía poco conocido, Ribeiro debe contarse entre los administradores estatales más prolíficos de su época. Ribeiro era negro. Nuestro objetivo al preparar este artículo es demostrar hasta qué punto un negro podía ascender en el Brasil del siglo XIX y mostrar cuánto podía lograr un seguidor motivado del presidente Floriano Peixoto como gobernador de un estado.

Palabras clave: science | technologie | innovation

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Brazil abolished slavery in 1888, the last state in the West to do so. The change to free labor could not but have profound political, financial, and social consequences. In political terms, the major immediate consequence proved to be a coup which replaced an Empire with a Republic and a five-year long military government (1889-1894). Post abolition governments, both imperial and republican created a major financial crisis by encouraging a reckless expansion of the money supply in order to lend to planters who had lost their chattel. The social consequence of abolition was the replacement of freedmen by Europeans on plantations while afro descendants continued their long struggle for equality in a now rapidly whitening Social Darwinist country.

The military government that assumed power at the start of the Republic contained many progressive elements led by General Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães. Although this minister died early in 1891, General Floriano Peixoto, who became president later that year, continued the campaign for reform. Upon obtaining office, he appointed nine military officers to govern states in the expectation that these men would enact on the local level the measures he advanced on the national scene. Among the two most successful of these governors was Captain Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro of Amazonas.

Ribeiro supervised the construction of the Opera House in Manaus, deep in the Amazon jungle, which captured the imaginations of contemporaries the world over. Although the celebrated Opera House constituted Ribeiro's most famous achievement, it was perhaps not even his most important one. In addition to building other monumental edifices in Manaus, Ribeiro established a network of elementary schools in his state while overseeing the eradication of yellow fever in Manaus, ten years before Rio de Janeiro, then the national capital, underwent a similar process. Significantly, like his leader, President Peixoto, Ribeiro balanced his budget and retired part of the state debt. His administration revealed what a progressive leader could accomplish at the start of the Republic. Unusually for this period, Ribeiro was brown ("pardo"). In this article, we examine his career from a racial perspective as well as from a political/public financial one.

Ribeiro began his military career when many individuals with his physical characteristics remained enslaved while, at the other social extreme, a very few who looked like him enjoyed admission to the imperial court.¹ Seven years before abolition, Aluísio de Azevedo published his novel *O Mulato*² which called attention to the plight of men of color who, through education, reached the highest plateaus of Brazilian society. Recent research shows that Azevedo described a real predicament as colored persons did achieve, under both Empire and Republic, positions of power by dint of personal effort and social contacts.³

Generally excluded from participation in politics, most afro descendants suffered routinely from racism which humiliated them and impeded their rise in various occupations. Whites saw them as "a eugenic pathology, ugly and without charm or elegance."⁴ In spite of this general situation, some coloreds could progress socially "thanks to chinks and loopholes within the Brazilian racist system," a system which claimed to tolerate blacks and mulatos while making every effort to exclude them from the "white man's world."⁵

Within the post-abolitionary regime, blacks and mulatos found themselves increasingly forced "to identify with psychosocial and moral whitening" to be accepted in white society. Eduardo Ribeiro's image conformed to this whitening pattern among successful afro descendants. From paintings exhibited in museums in Manaus, we can see his skin color lightened progressively; white society did not accept that the most important politician of the state displayed a dark complexion conceived by them as a sign of inferiority.⁶ During the final years of the nineteenth century, what then passed for science classified people by race. "Science" taught that, by nature, the white held the superior positions and the black the inferior ones. But rules of racial determination in Brazil did not prove hard and fast. Those who became rich and powerful

¹ See: Andre Rebouças, *Diário*.

² Azevedo, Aluísio. *O Mulato*.

³ Many biographies have been written about colored individuals who succeeded in Brazil before and after Abolition. See: Azevedo, *Orfeu da Carapinha*; Gomes e Domingues, *Experiências da Emancipação*; Grinberg, *O fiador dos brasileiros*; Pinto, *Escritos de liberdade*; Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: triste visionário*; Priore, *À procura deles*; and Silva, *Ora "maior Constitucional do Mundo", ora "vadio e desordeiro"*. See also Rebouças, *Diário*, essentially an autobiography.

⁴ Domingues, "Vai ficar tudo preto", 155.

⁵ Fernandes, *The Negro in Brazilian Society*.

⁶ Hofbauer, *Uma história de branqueamento*.

often began to be considered white, a situation facilitated by the fact that virtually all Brazilian whites had some black ancestors.

Education, particularly military education, provided men of color with a chance for social mobility in Brazil. Ribeiro's experience contrasts with his black contemporaries in the United States, who, excluded from the officer corps⁷, could only rise through civilian channels. As in the United States, so in Brazil, mobility varied from region to region. In the case of the latter, the Amazon, experiencing its rubber boom, provided a perceptive afro descendant with a special opportunity.

1. The Officer Corps, Politics and Mobility

The officer corps that Ribeiro entered in 1881 had already by 1850 ceased to function under the rules of the *ancien regime* becoming a professionalized corporation in which individuals from outside the elite could expect to rise through military efficiency and relations within the corporation⁸. Officers of the generation of 1850 held ideas that clashed with important sectors of the civilian elite – especially regarding slavery. These soldiers advocated freedom for the enslaved accompanied by immigration of Europeans, industrialization, expanded transportation, and enhanced education. Junior officers exercised little political influence during the 1850s because their superiors supported slavery while the civilian elite uniformly opposed military intervention in politics. Various events, of which the abolitionist campaign and the associated “Military Question” (concerning the officers’ rights to discuss abolition), proved most important, brought the officers into the political spotlight during the 1880s, just as the generation who studied during the 1850s assumed positions of command and just as Ribeiro commenced his military career. The officer corps contributed to abolition in various manners, including a refusal to hunt fugitives, and continued in politics once the enslaved finally achieved their liberty⁹.

Joining with sectors of the civilian elite, notably the coffee planters of São Paulo and of Rio de Janeiro, the military executed a coup d'état and declared a Republic on November 15, 1889. General Deodoro da Fonseca, the first military president, wishing to retain the support of the planters of Rio, permitted favored bankers to double the money supply by issuing and lending banknotes without real backing. This measure provoked a bubble followed by inflation and devaluation. Called the “*Encilhamento*”, this financial crisis actually began under the Empire, when the government sought to mollify coffee planters, who had not received compensation for the loss of their enslaved, by making cheap credit available for them to pay salaried workers¹⁰. Fonseca gravely exacerbated the *Encilhamento* which burst in 1891, discrediting him as well as the military in general. In response, he executed the “Stock Market Coup”, closing Congress in order to protect the beneficiaries of the bubble, but the navy, part of the army, and a group of politicians overthrew him within three weeks and replaced him by Vice President General Floriano Peixoto. Peixoto originally set about curbing the excesses and returning to sound finance. Although Peixoto eventually failed to restore monetary stability, he did make a serious attempt to balance the budget, stop the further issue of banknotes, and promote industrialization. When he took office, progressive officers had already helped to achieve abolition, the proclamation of the Republic, and the separation of Church and State. On May 12, 1892, at the opening of Congress, Peixoto published his program for further reform including industrialization, immigration, sanitation, enhanced education, and expanded transportation¹¹. By this date, Peixoto had nominated Ribeiro and eight other officers as governors to promote his reforms in their

⁷ Blight, *Fredrick Douglass*, p. 410. The Union Army during the Civil War did not give commissions to blacks. Fredrick Douglass, received by President Lincoln on several occasions, could not even get one when he went on a high-profile recruiting campaign. Blacks had to await another 90 years.

⁸ Regarding social mobility within the officer corps, in addition to our *O Exército na Política* and *Bacharel Fardado*, see Izeksohn, *Duas guerras nas Américas*, Kraay, *Race, State, and Armed Forces*, and McCann, *Soldiers of the Patria*.

⁹ See for instance *O Paiz*, October 26, 1887.

¹⁰ Schulz, *The Financial Crisis of Abolition*. See also Schulz, “Souza Franco” for an earlier attempt, by a statesman from the Amazon region, to accelerate progress on a national scale using financial instruments. For a view of the *Encilhamento* that differs from ours see Franco, *Reforma Monetária*.

¹¹ *Gazeta de Notícias*, May 13, 1892.

states.

We shall now turn to Ribeiro's career, looking at him from one angle as a colored man striving to rise within a racist society, and from another perspective, as a young reformist military officer decided on making Brazil a modern country like those of Northern Europe and North America.

No one has yet attempted a critical biography of Ribeiro although there exist several works that tell aspects of his story¹².

2. The First Steps in Maranhão¹³

Eduardo Ribeiro was born on September 18, 1862, in São Luís, capital of the northeastern state of Maranhão. As he came from a modest family, we know little of his childhood. His father's name did not appear on his baptism records, which later gave Ribeiro's enemies a chance to call him a bastard, then considered a major sign of inferiority. One of his detractors also claimed that Ribeiro's parents had been enslaved although this has never been substantiated. His mother peddled goods in São Luís during his childhood and then rose socially after he became governor. He had a sister who never married¹⁴.

We know nothing of his early education other than he numbered among the less than one fifth of the population, of all colors, that became literate. Given his mother's lack of resources, we assume that some patron found the boy Eduardo promising and helped him through primary school. In 1879, his seventeenth year, Ribeiro entered high school at the Liceu Maranhense, directed by the famous grammarian, Francisco Sotero dos Reis. A teacher at this school recalled that Ribeiro demonstrated a great desire for knowledge, especially of French and mathematics, two of the three subjects – the other being Portuguese – that comprised the entrance examination for the military academy in Rio¹⁵. At the Liceu Maranhense, Ribeiro encountered the sons of the state's elite, including Aluisio de Azevedo, soon to be author of *O Mulato*. By his eighteenth birthday, Ribeiro began working for *O Pensador*, an anti-clerical newspaper. This paper advocated abolition while many of its journalists espoused Positivism. Rumor had it that the Masonic Lodges, then influential in Brazil, financed this endeavor¹⁶.

3. Life as a Military Student in the Capital

Less than half a year after the inauguration of *O Pensador*, Ribeiro achieved his goal of entering an institution of higher education. On February 24, 1881, he enlisted in the army and commenced his studies at the military academy in Rio de Janeiro. The capital of the Empire, with half a million inhabitants, represented the political, cultural, financial, and economic center of the country and dwarfed all the other cities at this time¹⁷. It housed a medical college and a civilian engineering college as well as the military and naval academies. São Luís had no higher education at all. Indeed, Rio constituted the great attraction for all Brazilian youth.

To enter the military academy, Ribeiro passed a competitive exam that included mathematics, Portuguese, and French grammar. He fulfilled the other two requirements: good health and age, being between 16 and

¹² See: Bittencourt, *Dicionário Amazonense de Biografia: Monteiro, Negritude e Modernidade*; Braga, *Eduardo Ribeiro vida e obra*. The best study, although it does not focus exclusively on Ribeiro is Mesquita, "La Belle Vitrine".

¹³ For further details on the context see: Matos, "O bacharel 'pardo'", chapter 1.

¹⁴ Inventário de Códices do Arquivo da Arquidiocese do Maranhão. Livro de Registro de Óbitos da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Capital. Livro nº 47 de 1915 – 1921. Arquivo Público do Estado do Maranhão.

¹⁵ *A Federação*, Sept 18, 1898, (article by Manoel de Bethencourt).

¹⁶ For importance of Masonic Lodges, see Monteiro, *A Maçonaria*.

¹⁷ See Needell, *A Tropical Belle Epoque*.

25 years old. On his service record¹⁸ (*fe de ofício*), he described himself as a “*pardo*” which meant mixed white and black¹⁹. Brazilian racism did not extend to prohibiting men of color from becoming officers. The army officer corps provided the outstanding form of mobility for colored men and less favored white men as well. The army provided barracks, uniforms, and mess for the military students. Students at the law, medical, and engineering schools had to house, clothe, and feed themselves. The Catholic Church provided another ladder of mobility, but many parish priests had niggardly incomes while favoritism probably played a greater role in advancement than it did in the military. Most large-scale commerce remained in the hands of the Portuguese and other foreigners leaving few opportunities for Brazilians²⁰. Finally, investment in commercial agriculture generally came from individuals who already had resources and social contacts. Although the army did not match the other professions for total remuneration, it did constitute the easiest route to upward mobility.

Eduardo Ribeiro had an excellent record at the academy with high grades and praise from his superiors. After six years of study, the prescribed period of the course, in January of 1887, he received his degree as a military engineer, the longest and most prestigious program at the academy²¹. This degree represented a major accomplishment for anyone not from an elite family, especially for a man of color. A new second lieutenant, he looked forward to a successful army career.

We searched for examples of discrimination during Ribeiro’s stay at the academy or later in his military career. We found no such evidence in his autobiography or in any other source although he did suffer heavy racist attacks during the latter period of his gubernatorial administration. The lack of evidence does not imply that racism did not exist. Even the rabidly abolitionist *Tribuna Militar*, a newspaper published by young army officers while Ribeiro studied at the academy wrote: “The lazy Negro race, lacking energy due to its upbringing and inheritance, can only be stimulated by a whip”.²²

4. Arrival in Manaus and the First Steps in Amazonian Politics

As soon as he received his diploma, Ribeiro boarded a steamship to join the third field artillery battalion stationed in Manaus, to which he had been assigned on March 5, 1886, while completing his last year at the academy. His ship took him to Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon, where he would take another vessel upriver to Manaus. In Belem, Colonel Francisco Cardoso Júnior, commanding officer of the province, commandeered Ribeiro’s services and placed him in the fourth artillery battalion, based in that city. In April, Ribeiro became director of the regimental school. During the six months in Belem, he received praise from his superiors as reflected in his service records²³. In August, Ribeiro finally departed Belem and proceeded to Manaus to assume his position in the third battalion as per his original orders. Historian Arthur Cezar Ferreira Reis hypothesizes that the move from Belém to Manaus at this time may have been a political punishment, either for being an abolitionist or a republican²⁴.

Ribeiro certainly favored abolition as the army officer corps stridently advocated freeing the enslaved since the decade of the 1850s²⁵. By the 1880s, virtually all of even the general officers had abolitionist sympathies. Speaking for abolition would not have elicited punishment in 1887, and most of the officer corps publicly disobeyed orders to hunt escaped fugitives during that year²⁶.

¹⁸ *Fé de Ofício* (servicerecord): pasta no. III-6-36-SAP-AHEX (Arquivo Histórico do Exército).

¹⁹ To understand more about the nuances of color in nineteenth century Brazil see: Stolze, *Cores, marcas e falas*.

²⁰ See Ridings, *Business Interest Groups*.

²¹ *Fé de Ofício*: pasta no. III-6-36-SAP-AHEX (Arquivo Histórico do Exército).

²² *Tribuna Militar*, January 1, 1882. To be fair, this paper also published arguments favorable to the plight of colored men. See for example edition of September 25, 1881.

²³ *Fé de Ofício*: pasta no. III-6-36-SAP-AHEX (Arquivo Histórico do Exército).

²⁴ Reis, *História do Amazonas*, p.337.

²⁵ Schulz, *O Exército na Política*, chapter 2. See for example *O Militar*, April 25, 1855

²⁶ Schulz *O Exército na Política*, chapter 6 and O Paiz, 21-26 October 1887.

Beginning when Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães became a professor at the military academy of Rio de Janeiro in 1873, Positivist and Republican ideas gradually spread among the military students. As Ribeiro, when governor of Amazonas, named a major bridge as well as an important public school after Benjamin Constant, we may assume at least a sympathy for Positivism and Republicanism since his days at the academy. His collaboration with Ximeno de Villeroy, his predecessor as governor, and Fileto Pires Ferreira, his successor, both prominent Positivist followers of Benjamin Constant, also suggests a commitment to Positivism which implied Republicanism. On the other hand, Ribeiro does not seem to have been among the most visible of Benjamin Constant's disciples. In an extensive list of Positivist officers, Ivan Lins mentions several future governors contemporary to Ribeiro, including Villeroy and Ferreira, but fails to include him²⁷. Probably, therefore, Ribeiro's transfer to Manaus did not constitute a reprisal for his Republicanism.

During Ribeiro's lifetime, Rio de Janeiro appeared to be the most desirable location for army officers and quartered over a quarter of them when the military schools are included. Rio Grande do Sul contained a similar portion leaving less than half of the officer corps to garrison the remainder of a huge country. Having relatively little political pull, Ribeiro must have expected an assignment outside the two major centers. Frequently during the Empire, officers found themselves transferred to unhealthy locations in the Amazon or in Matto Grosso due to individual political rivalries rather than for Republicanism or Abolitionism²⁸. At critical moments of the Military Question, the most vocal opponents of the government regarding abolition, but only the most vocal, found themselves removed to remote locations. During one such episode, while Ribeiro studied at the military academy, the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias* charged "... we are not soldiers and do not fear a trip to Matto Grosso, because, *for the time being*, they have not yet begun to deport civilians, but it may come to this if things continue the way they are heading"²⁹. But, to conclude, we have no evidence either of political problems, personal animosity, or racial discrimination leading to Ribeiro's assignment to Manaus, which in any case, was much more desirable than posting to the interior of the province. On the contrary, we have seen that, due to proper planning, his orders to proceed to Manaus had been issued 10 months before his graduation³⁰. His stay in Belem appears to have been caused by the local commander's wish to take advantage of Ribeiro's skills, a wish thwarted by the bureaucracy which sent Ribeiro to the city and the unit to which he had been duly assigned. Accordingly, in August of 1887, together with fellow lieutenants, Marcos Franco Rabello and Cariolano de Carvalho e Silva, the latter a future governor of Piauí, Ribeiro left Belem for Manaus on the *Fulleston*³¹.

Arriving in Manaus, he joined the third field artillery battalion where he dedicated himself to his professional activities and did not appear involved in the Republican movement in that city. He later boasted that: "he had the satisfaction of winning the good will of all without regard to party"³². Amazonas numbered among two provinces – Ceará being the other – that abolished slavery in 1884 so that Ribeiro did not participate in the final excited months of protests that lead to abolition in the center of the country. While this conflict played out in Rio and São Paulo, he quietly rose from acting adjutant of the battalion to adjutant of the provincial commanding officer by early 1888. In his spare time, he taught school to increase his meager salary, a common practice among military officers. Manaus at that time lacked qualified instructors. Ribeiro also participated in various provincial and municipal commissions. On June 11, 1888, outgoing Provincial Governor Francisco Antonio Pimenta Bueno wrote to Ribeiro's commander: "I am grateful for his help in my administration"³³. On July 30, Ribeiro was promoted from adjutant to acting secretary of the provincial commanding officer, a job he held until the Proclamation of the Republic on November 15, 1889.

²⁷ Lins, *História do Positivismo no Brasil*, p. 295-296. These include Lauro Sodre, Alexandre Barbosa Lima, and Jose Bezerill Fontenelle.

²⁸ Schulz, *O Exército na Política*, p.91-92.

²⁹ *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 23, 1883.

³⁰ *Fé de Ofício*: pasta no. III-6-36-SAP-AHex.

³¹ *O Liberal do Pará*, August 14, 1887.

³² Ribeiro, *Contra a Calúnia*, p. 9.

³³ *Fé de ofício*: pasta no. III-6-36.

The province of Amazonas did not take an active role in the movements leading to the coup d'état in Rio de Janeiro that established the Republic. As Manaus still lacked telegraph connections with the rest of the country, the city only learned of the regime change when news arrived by ship. On November 21, a junta peacefully replaced the imperial governor of the province. Colonel Antonio Florencio Pereira do Lago, the provincial commanding officer and Ribeiro's boss, presided over the junta composed of the naval commander and a civilian. Colonel Lago immediately made Ribeiro the secretary of the junta, the latter's first political position. On December 4, the army and navy officers formed a Military Club in Manaus, in emulation of the clubs in the center and south of the country. Colonel Lago also presided over this association and called upon Ribeiro to be its second secretary. This nomination indicates that Ribeiro enjoyed the confidence of the Republican leadership and that, in all probability, politicians knew of Ribeiro's political leanings.³⁴

On January 3, 1890, the Provisional Government, on the recommendation of its minister of war, General Benjamin Constant, appointed a young lieutenant, Ximeno de Villeroy, governor of Amazonas, replacing the provisional junta. Governor Villeroy, from a better-connected family than Ribeiro, was only six months his senior. Villeroy, the white son of an army captain stationed in Rio Grande do Sul, had joined the military in 1876, becoming a second lieutenant in 1882 and a first lieutenant in 1885. Like Ribeiro, Villeroy completed the military engineering program. Before the Proclamation of the Republic, his peers already considered Villeroy an outspoken Positivist and Republican.

Villeroy retained Ribeiro as secretary of the governor. Probably, they knew each other from their academy days, and the governor passed increasing responsibilities to Ribeiro, appointing him director of public works. Following decisions in the capital, the Villeroy administration placed into effect the separation of Church and State, terminating religious instructions in the schools. Interestingly, Villeroy decreed July 10, the day in 1884 when Amazonas freed its enslaved, as a state holiday³⁵. Assisted by Ribeiro, the governor presided, on September 15, over the election of senators and deputies to represent the state in the Constituent Assembly, which met on November 15. Amazonas sent two military officers friendly to Villeroy and Ribeiro as federal deputies, Captain Manoel Uchoa Rodrigues and naval Lieutenant Commander Manoel Ignacio Belfort Vieira. Significantly, one of the senators elected, Manuel Francisco Machado, Baron of Solimões, had been the imperial governor of Amazonas deposed by the advent of the Republic, while another, Joaquim Jose Sarmiento, also had been a Liberal leader and acting governor under the monarchy³⁶.

Ribeiro wisely took part in the founding of the first republican party in Amazonas, the Democratic Party. The brothers and former imperial politicians, Guilherme Jose Moreira, Villeroy's vice governor, and Emilio Moreira, commanded this group, incorporated on July 27. Guilherme Jose Moreira, Baron of Jurua, had twice served as acting governor of Amazonas, in 1878 and 1884, and led the Liberal Party under the monarchy³⁷. His new Democratic Party attracted largely members of his former affiliation while many erstwhile Conservative politicians joined the National Party, formed shortly thereafter³⁸.

For reasons that are not quite clear, perhaps relating to his wife's illness³⁹, or to the illness of his mentor, Benjamin Constant, or to a wish to be in the capital during the Constituent Assembly, Villeroy suddenly decided to return to Rio and announced that he would nominate Ribeiro as acting governor on November 2. Guilherme Jose Moreira, the vice governor, who should have taken over, was out of state. To execute the transfer to Ribeiro and to avoid returning power to the traditional oligarchy, Villeroy nominated Ribeiro as second vice governor, on November 6, swore him in as acting governor three days later, and departed immediately thereafter. On January 3, 1891, seeing Ribeiro securely in control, Villeroy resigned definitively without returning to Manaus. Ribeiro's assumption of power numbered among a series of arbitrary actions taken by officers during the military government.

Ribeiro's first administration, lasting six months, continued his predecessor's initiatives to balance the

³⁴ A *Epocha*, December 5, 1889.

³⁵ Reis, *História de Amazonas* p. 327.

³⁶ Reis, *História de Amazonas*, p. 342-343

³⁷ Reis, p. 342-343

³⁸ Reis, p. 329

³⁹ Reis, p. 327.

state budget, reduce the public debt, fight smuggling, and prepare a state constitution. Events in Rio de Janeiro had a profound effect on Ribeiro's efforts. On January 20, 1891, the Provisional Government, including Minister of Education General Benjamin Constant, then on his deathbed, and Minister of War General Floriano Peixoto, resigned as its members joined the opposition against President General Deodoro da Fonseca. Fonseca appointed a ministry led by the Baron of Lucena, composed largely of civilian politicians who had held office under the monarchy. The armed forces split into two contending factions, with Ribeiro's friends following General Peixoto into opposition. On February 24, the final version of the new Federal Constitution passed the Constituent Assembly which, under the terms of its mandate, transformed into a regular Congress charged with electing the president of Brazil, which it proceeded to do the next day. By widespread use of bribery and threat of force, General Fonseca prevailed over the civilian leader from São Paulo, Prudente de Morais, president of Congress. General Peixoto defeated Admiral Wandenkolk, Fonseca's running mate, to become vice president. Ximeno de Villeroy, close to Peixoto, presented a motion in the Military Club that day declaring the recently deceased General Benjamin Constant as the "Founder of the Republic", a clear affront to the president⁴⁰. Ribeiro's days in government appeared numbered.

A few weeks after the show down in Rio, on March 13, Ribeiro promulgated the new Constitution of Amazonas, which he did under authority granted to the state governors by the Provisional Government. Ribeiro also scheduled elections for the first State Assembly for May 1, convening this body for June 21. This Assembly enjoyed a mandate to elect the new governor and vice governor as the federal Congress had elected the president and vice president. Beginning in March, Fonseca and Lucena gradually replaced those governors allied to the opposition by men closer to themselves, alleging that the state constitutions had not yet entered effect, so the central government retained the power to appoint the local executives. In early April, they replaced Ribeiro with Lieutenant Colonel Taumaturgo de Azevedo. When news of this change reached Manaus on April 12, the Democratic Party led a protest to retain Ribeiro. In this politically charged atmosphere, the leaders of the Democratic Party put their names to a declaration of support for Ribeiro⁴¹. Lucena hesitated, ordering Azevedo to wait in Recife until the situation stabilized. Ribeiro, therefore, managed to hold the elections on May 1, but Fonseca and Lucena finally decided to remove him, a decision communicated to Ribeiro by the local naval commander on the fifth⁴². The army transferred Ribeiro to Rio as a professor at the Military Academy. Vice Governor Guilherme Jose Moreira finally became governor, but only for 20 days. Allied to Ribeiro at this moment, Moreira led the demonstration that delayed Azevedo's assumption of power. Lucena apparently brokered a deal in which Moreira accepted Azevedo in return for the prospect of remaining as vice governor. Colonel Antonio Gomes Pimentel took over the government at Lucena's command in late May and oversaw the inauguration of the State Assembly, as summoned by Ribeiro, the following month. The Assembly duly elected Colonel Taumaturgo de Azevedo as governor and the persistent Guilherme Jose Moreira as vice governor. The vice governor's brother, Emilio, presided over this body. After a further two month's delay, Taumaturgo de Azevedo arrived in Manaus to be sworn in on September 1.

Azevedo had a hard time as Acting Governor Moreira had filled the public service with members of his Democratic Party during this interval⁴³. Azevedo's agenda conflicted with that of Ribeiro in that the new governor advocated utilizing state revenues to build churches – despite the separation of Church and State-- while also differing with that of the Moreiras who wanted to continue the proposed opera house while Azevedo wished to cancel the building contract⁴⁴. As the state legislature had been elected during Ribeiro's last days, it contained many deputies who favored Vice President Peixoto rather than President Fonseca. Meanwhile, by November, events reached an impasse in Rio de Janeiro as Congress and President Fonseca found no common ground. The general attempted a coup, illegally closing Congress on November 3, but was himself overthrown in a counter stroke led by the navy and Vice President Peixoto's supporters

⁴⁰ Mendes, *Benjamin Constant*, p. 498.

⁴¹ See his *Contra a Calúnia*, p. 3.

⁴² Reis, *História de Amazonas*, p. 329.

⁴³ Reis, *História de Amazonas*, p. 330.

⁴⁴ Mesquita, "La Belle Vitrine", p. 327.

in the army 20 days later. Among the governors, only Major Lauro Sodre of Para opposed Fonseca's coup. Peixoto now resolved to replace all the others.

5. Eduardo Ribeiro's Second Administration

Between the countercoup which brought him to power on November 23, 1891, and the end of the following February, Peixoto removed all the governors that supported his predecessor's coup⁴⁵. In fact, only Major Lauro Sodre of Para, Benjamin Constant's right hand during the Provisional Government, who had defied Fonseca, remained. In São Paulo, the dominant PRP (Republican Party of São Paulo) returned to office while Peixoto allowed this party to designate Francisco Rodrigues Alves as his minister of finance. The *Gazeta de Notícias* revealed in its edition of January 4, 1892, that the vice president, (as he insisted on being called) planned to re-appoint Ximeno de Villeroy as governor of Amazonas. The incumbent, Colonel Azevedo, withstood with armed force this first attempt at deposition, arresting several individuals and deporting the president of the State Assembly to the interior⁴⁶. To finance his resistance, Azevedo went so far as to suggest that Amazonas issue its own currency⁴⁷. On February 3, Peixoto nominated Captain Eduardo Ribeiro to return as governor of Amazonas. The governor-designate immediately embarked in Rio bound for Manaus, and while he steamed northward, Peixoto's officers finally overcame Azevedo, leaving the local naval commander as acting governor pending Ribeiro's arrival. As in Amazonas, veritable civil wars took place in states like Minas Gerais and Ceara before the vice president's partisans could assume power. In no fewer than nine states, Peixoto, acting as if he legitimately held the same power to appoint governors that Dom Pedro II had enjoyed during the monarchy, nominated military officers to govern. One of these, Manoel Inacio Belfort Vieira, of Maranhão, was a naval officer whose father had been a senator of the Empire. In fact, Lieutenant Commander Belfort Vieira, elected a federal deputy from Amazonas during the Villeroy administration, must have been close to Villeroy and Ribeiro⁴⁸. The other eight governors were well educated young army officers, like Ribeiro, who had been influenced by Benjamin Constant and now followed General Peixoto⁴⁹. Many of these men came from families outside the elite; Ribeiro was the only colored.

Vice President Peixoto, favored conservative fiscal and monetary policies, immediately terminating the abuses of the Encilhamento⁵⁰; he also strongly advanced the industrialization of Brazil. During the second semester of 1892, Peixoto replaced Finance Minister Rodrigues Alves with Benjamin Constant's disciple, Lieutenant Colonel Serzedelo Correa, who launched Brazil's first industrialization campaign including a bill to provide protective tariffs for textiles and another for the legislature to provide a large loan facility for industrial concerns affected by the devaluation of the local currency caused by the Encilhamento. Peixoto set forth his program in May featuring the expansion of education as well as sanitation and increased transportation⁵¹. To accommodate Peixoto's allies from São Paulo, his government subsidized immigration from Europe and succeeded in passing a law permitting immigration from Asia. As stipulated by the new Constitution, the federal government passed to the states the right to collect export taxes, a particularly important factor for exporting states like São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Para, and Amazonas. While Peixoto struggled to implement his policies on the national scene, the officers he appointed as governors had their opportunity to enact changes on the state level that would cause Brazil to emulate the

⁴⁵ The *Gazeta de Notícias*, which had supported Peixoto against Fonseca, began to complain as soon as the illegal depositions began. See number of December 15, 1891.

⁴⁶ Mesquita, "La Belle Vitrine" p. 330.

⁴⁷ *Rio News*, February 9, 1892.

⁴⁸ Reis, *História de Amazonas*, p. 326-327

⁴⁹ They included Ribeiro, Major Lauro Sodre of Para, who continued as governor, Captain Alexandre Jose Barbosa Lima for Pernambuco, Captain Coriolano da Silva for Piaui, Lieutenant Coronel Jose Fontenelle for Ceara, Major Alvaro Machado for Paraíba, Captain Gabino Besouro for Alagoas, and Lieutenant Manoel Joaquim Machado for Santa Catarina, source: *Almanaques Militares*, 1892-1896.

⁵⁰ Schulz *The Financial Crisis of Abolition*, chapter 7.

⁵¹ *Gazeta de Notícias*, May 13, 1892.

material and cultural practices of the most advanced nations.

Having departed Rio on February 2, 1892, Ribeiro arrived in Manaus on March 10, after a brief stop in Belem, to confer with Governor Lieutenant Colonel Lauro Sodre, now one of the most powerful figures in the country. At his gubernatorial inauguration in the city hall of Manaus the day following his arrival, Ribeiro declared “I ratify my promise, made in the federal capital, to General Floriano Peixoto, to govern the people well . . .” His partisans acclaimed Ribeiro as “as the illustrious representative of General Floriano Peixoto”⁵². No one could doubt whence emanated the power of Ribeiro and his fellow governors. Peixoto’s confidence, supported by the full strength of the federal government, proved sufficient for all the state executives to rapidly win elections for a four-year term. Once elected, the new governors had to reach an understanding with elements of the local elites, who controlled the state legislatures, in order to govern just as Peixoto had to do on the national level. Ribeiro commenced his second term in a close alliance with the Moreiras. Captain Alexandre Barbosa Lima, governor of Pernambuco, encountered serious difficulties in forming a coalition. Even taking a member of the powerful Cavalcanti clan as his vice governor, Barbosa Lima almost suffered deposition on more than one occasion during his four-year term. His major accomplishment, as evidenced in his final annual governor’s report, was to have survived, nothing more⁵³.

Ribeiro enjoyed much more success than his colleague from Pernambuco. The day after inauguration, Ribeiro, in keeping with the actions of the other military governors, dissolved the State Assembly. Less than a week later, on March 18, he set the date for the elections of the new Assembly for April 22, stipulating direct elections of the governor and vice governor, as opposed to election by the Assembly as had occurred the previous year. Only two days after this decree, the National Party, composed largely of former imperial politicians belonging to the Conservative Party, held a publicized demonstration in opposition to Ribeiro. In fact, the National Party’s belligerence made Ribeiro strengthen his existing relationship with the Moreira’s Democratic Party. Guilherme Jose Moreira, who the reader will recall, had been vice governor under the Empire, vice governor to Ximeno de Villeroy (prevented from taking office due to Villeroy and Ribeiro’s coup), vice governor in Ribeiro’s first term, (deposed by Fonseca after only 20 days in office), and vice governor to Thaumaturgo de Azevedo, (not allowed to succeed on the latter’s resignation), once again became vice governor, this time for an “elected” four-year term.

The day after the polls duly returned Ribeiro as governor and Moreira as vice governor, the *Diário de Manáos* -- the organ of the National Party -- denounced electoral fraud. The paper provided numbers which we cannot verify⁵⁴. As transpired under the monarchy, the party that controlled the government generally won elections. For the duration of the First Republic (1889-1930), elections continued as they had done under the rule of the emperors. Ribeiro acted as provisional governor until July 23, the date the new state constitution came into force, when he and Moreira were sworn in as governor and vice governor, respectively. With the support of Moreira’s party, Ribeiro enjoyed a collaborative legislature until disputes over succession muddled the waters.

⁵² *Diário de Manáos*, March 12, 1892.

⁵³ *Mensagem do Governador*, Pernambuco, 1896.

⁵⁴ *Diário de Manáos*, March 20, 1892.

6. Actions in Rubber City

Ribeiro set forth his plans to the state assembly on June 1. The governor emphasized the need to improve public education, making several references to General Benjamin Constant, minister of education from April 1890 until his death in January of the following year. During this minister's tenure, the federal government enacted major reforms in the primary and secondary school programs in Rio de Janeiro, measures that the governor of Amazonas took as his model⁵⁵. Ribeiro spoke at length about his construction program that included the Opera House as well as the governor's palace, schools, courts, and penitentiaries. He proposed to bring modern sanitation practices to Manaus, to drain swamps, and to build streets, bridges, and squares. To professionalize the administration, he granted tenure to all public servants on the payroll for ten years. Outside the public sector, he told the assembly he wished to encourage the establishment of central sugar mills and of industries and trade in general⁵⁶.

Ribeiro reorganized the land office and sought to expedite the issuance of deeds⁵⁷. To the same end, he issued a new land law regulating access to public acres. He hoped immigrants from abroad and from the northeastern states would be able to avail themselves of the opportunities to bring virgin land into cultivation for foodstuffs⁵⁸. Ribeiro, as well as many other members of elite, recognized the need to diversify the economy of Amazonas; time would show that the quality of the land proved a severe obstacle⁵⁹. From his time to ours, administering the land law has constituted a challenge; a few privileged individuals have gained "legal" rights to large areas while many unprivileged remain as squatters on small plots without valid title.

On the specific level, Ribeiro had already, by decree of April 26, reorganized the state school for orphaned girls renaming it the Benjamin Constant Institute. The Institute hoped to house 100 students but in fact held 50 in 1894⁶⁰. A few months later, on August 31, Ribeiro established the *Diario Oficial*, an official government publication listing all laws and appointments, taking a similar federal government organ as his example.

Ribeiro recognized that the rubber boom made his ambitious projects possible. He took office with 2500 contos in the treasury (\$400,000 in US currency at that time). Annual state income for 1893 attained 8000 contos (\$1.3 million), a large number for the Brazil at that time (four times the budget of the Northeastern state of Ceara that year, for instance)⁶¹. Modest amounts of rubber had been exported from the beginning of the nineteenth century, due to that commodity's water-repellent qualities, for use in raincoats and galoshes. The invention of vulcanization in 1839 made possible further uses for rubber. By the 1890s, the expansion of the bicycle industry as well as the beginning of automobiles caused demand for rubber to expand astronomically⁶². The Brazilian states of Para and Amazonas produced well over half the worldwide supply of rubber with the remainder coming from West Africa⁶³.

The boom came just when the Republican Constitution of 1891 transferred the export tariffs to the states. Total state revenues, of which rubber export receipts proved by far the most important part, rose from 2243 contos in 1890 to 10,264 contos in 1895, Ribeiro's last full year in office⁶⁴. Even considering the extensive devaluation of this period, state revenues more than doubled in real terms. Devaluation incidentally favored the rubber lords as their costs in local currency rose slower than their income in Sterling. The volume of rubber exported expanded every year while prices remained firm measured in hard currency, and prospects

⁵⁵ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1892, p. 12-14. To place Ribeiro's educational policy within the big history, see Lindert, *Growing Public*, p 87-127 including figures p 90.

⁵⁶ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1892, p. 16-17

⁵⁷ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1892, p. 10

⁵⁸ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*, p 138-148, discusses the contemporary debate in Para regarding attempts to stimulate agriculture and industry in order to balance the economy and avoid over-reliance on rubber extraction.

⁵⁹ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*, p 28.

⁶⁰ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1894, p 17.

⁶¹ *Mensagem do Governador*, Ceará, 1896, p. 15.

⁶² *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1893, p 16.

⁶³ Clarence-Smith, *The Third Portuguese Empire*, chapter 4.

⁶⁴ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1895.

appeared excellent. Furthermore, Ribeiro struggled to increase the share of Amazonas' rubber cleared through the customs of Manaus, as opposed to the customs of Belem, downstream at the mouth of the Amazon in neighboring Para.

During this buoyant period, comprising the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, the Brazilian rubber lords knew of experiments with rubber trees in all the equatorial areas of the world, but none of these seemed particularly threatening at this time. In fact, as late as 1906, 10 years after Ribeiro left office, Brazil exported 29,000 tons of latex while Malaysia exported only 500 tons⁶⁵. Of course, five years later, the Malaysians flooded the world market with plantation rubber, the price of the commodity plummeted, and the states of Amazonas and Para fell into severe deficit.

The extraction of rubber from the wild-grown trees required a large supply of labor. Thus far, most rubber workers came from the Brazilian Northeast, the same region as did Ribeiro himself. Europeans generally avoided the Amazon due to its extremely hot and unhealthy climate, so Ribeiro hoped to attract Chinese and Japanese immigrants. He closely followed the attempts of a coalition of the PRP and Peixoto's followers to obtain a law stimulating this immigration, which passed the national legislature in October of 1892. Ribeiro argued that "representatives of the yellow race" contributed to the progress of Peru, Mexico, Cuba, and the US state of California. He noted that the Chinese were brought up "with an education based upon strict morals." As soon as the national law went into force, he began to search for Asians interested in moving to his state⁶⁶. The immigration of Asians to the Amazon and to São Paulo, as well as the immigration of Europeans to the latter, tended to take job opportunities away from the largely afro descendant local populations. Members of the elite, including many abolitionists, favored European immigration in order to whiten Brazil's population. São Paulo planters often forced the former enslaved off their lands to make way for Europeans; industrialists in the contemporary United States, replaced blacks with Irish and German immigrants.⁶⁷ Although some coffee barons opposed Asian immigration on racial grounds, others, as well as the Amazonian rubber lords, appreciated the Asians' work habits. As we see above, Ribeiro himself adopted the stereotypes of racism in his arguments.

From his accession in March of 1892 through the end of April of the following year, Ribeiro operated in a favorable environment where his leader, General Peixoto, enjoyed a series of successes. Let us turn to Ribeiro's endeavors during this period.

7. Public Education

Ribeiro believed in free, lay, and mandatory public education. He felt that such education should emphasize moral and civic values as well as provide practical and manual training including gymnastics, military exercises, agronomy, design, music, and sewing "which would prepare those who serve the fatherland"⁶⁸. As an engineer and as a professor, he naturally defended a curriculum weighted towards the sciences with the installation of laboratories for physics and biology.⁶⁹

By the turn of 1893, Ribeiro completed his plan for the construction of public schools, especially in Manaus, which before his accession had only two such buildings in operation. He organized a committee, which included his classmate from the military academy, Captain and Federal Deputy Manoel Uchôa Rodrigues. Their plan provided Manaus with 15 school districts and 22 schools, of which 5 for males, 6 for females and 11 coeds⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, chapter 3.

⁶⁶ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1894, p. 24-26.

⁶⁷ Blight, *Yale and Slavery*, p. 231.

⁶⁸ *Mensagem de Governador*, Amazonas, 1894, p. 14.

⁶⁹ *Mensagem de Governador*, Amazonas, 1892, p. 14-15.

⁷⁰ *Mensagem de Governador*, Amazonas, 1893, p. 5.

In 1893, Eduardo Ribeiro divided the one state secondary school, established during the Villeroy administration, into a *Gynásio Amazonense* (High School of Amazonas) and a normal school, with the responsibility for training sufficient primary teachers to meet the need created by the expansion of the system⁷¹. Before Ribeiro's development of the educational system, the state already lacked trained primary teachers so that many public schools either had no teachers at all or had instructors whose knowledge proved less than adequate. His rapid expansion made the normal school's task much greater. The governor hoped the orphan asylum, which he expanded and renamed as the Benjamin Constant Institute, would help supply elementary school teachers. Ribeiro repeatedly announced competitive examinations for the teaching positions, but, especially in the interior, he could not find qualified personnel. By the end of 1894, Amazonas had 105 public schools of which 22 in the capital and 83 in the countryside. On February 15 of that year, he reorganized the state vocational school, calling it the *Instituto de Artes e Ofícios*⁷². He both built a new physical structure and added significantly to the course of study, once again introducing modern scientific instruction.

8. Beautification and Public Health

Eduardo Ribeiro desired to turn Manaus into a center of culture, modernity, and beauty. As the municipality lacked the necessary resources, the governor decided to bankroll these improvements out of the state budget. He extended his activity to the outskirts of the city as well as to its center. Among his close collaborators were Captain Manoel Uchoa Rodrigues and two civilian engineers, João Carlos Antony and João Baptista Bittencourt⁷³.

Without doubt, the Opera House constituted their greatest accomplishment. In fact, the original contract to build the Opera dated from 1883, under the Empire⁷⁴. Ribeiro returned to office with the foundations of the building in place, but work had been long abandoned and his predecessor, Colonel Azevedo, had even attempted to rescind the building contract. On August 31, 1892, Ribeiro authorized back payments due to the contractor, Rossi & Irmão, in order to resume construction. Once work began again, Governor Ribeiro described the Opera House as boasting a luxurious façade, space for an audience of 1000 spectators, and modern defenses against fires and other disasters⁷⁵. He took an active role in the building, determining that the outside of the dome would be decorated with designs that recalled the Brazilian flag while ordering the ceilings of the dome and the banqueting hall to contain allegories of the Republic. The first opera was performed on December 31, 1896, shortly after the end of Ribeiro's term.

Opera had been performed in Brazil since the eighteenth century in theaters located in the principal capitals as well as several other towns. The theater inaugurated in 1770 in Ouro Preto, then the thriving capital of Minas Gerais, could hold an audience of 250 and survives through today.⁷⁶ Belem, the capital of Para, inaugurated Brazil's first large modern opera, the Teatro da Paz, as early as 1878, compared to 1883 for the earliest modern opera house of New York and 1900 for that of Philadelphia, the first two such facilities in the United States, although operas had been performed in that country in smaller venues also since the eighteenth century. The opera houses in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo opened in 1909 and 1911 respectively. For the cultured and wealthy of all these cities, the construction of an opera hall marked a coming of age that confirmed the status of their metropolis. After the collapse of the rubber boom, contemporaries outside Manaus and Belem attacked these buildings as wasteful, as do some historians⁷⁷.

⁷¹ Braga, *Eduardo Ribeiro*, p. 138-140.

⁷² *Mensagem de Governador*, Amazonas, 1894, p. 16.

⁷³ Mesquita, *La Belle Vitrine*, p. 211.

⁷⁴ Mesquita, p. 327.

⁷⁵ Mesquita, p. 217.

⁷⁶ Brescia, *A Casa da Opera de Vila Rica*.

⁷⁷ Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, along the course of chapter three, argues that Amazonas and Pará had been frivolous in their expenses. His footnote 23 cites Chamber of Deputies Política Economica, 217 as well as Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*, 272.

Without entering the argument concerning the value of cultural goods, we may question the priorities of societies that build opera houses before they establish universities. New York and Philadelphia contained full universities over a century before they enjoyed monumental opera houses while Rio and São Paulo had some form of higher education almost a century before their municipal theaters. On the other hand, those who see the Opera in Manaus cannot fail to be moved by its beauty and impressed by the logistical feat of transporting materials from France and Italy into the depth of a jungle.

In addition to the schools and the Opera House, Ribeiro began the remodeling of Manaus during his first year in office. The state assembly provided him with a law dating from October 1, 1892, that permitted him to reclaim flooded land, according to modern scientific practices, around the creeks in the neighborhoods of São Vicente, Espírito Santo, and Praça 5 de maio. This law authorized him to either select outside contractors through public bids or to manage administratively with hired employees. In addition to landfills, Ribeiro set about channeling streams. He built bridges, both out of steel and out of bricks, over four larger rivers. By shifting land from higher elevations to lower ones, he proposed to make Manaus a more level city with clear signs of urban planning⁷⁸.

Contemporary European capitals, especially Paris, served as his inspiration. He placed public edifices and monuments in strategic position within the city while establishing new gardens in the European style taking advantage of the exuberant plants of the Amazon Forest. In 1894, he opened a public competition to build a garden in the Republic Square, calling for a sumptuous bronze statue as well as a multitude of different vegetation. He also developed or improved three other major gardens including Constitution Square. During his four-year term, in addition to the Opera House, he built an imposing new courthouse just behind the Opera, the Benjamin Constant Institute, the offices of the *Diário Oficial*, and some 20 schools⁷⁹. Tellingly, he did not complete the governor's palace which his successors tore down and rebuilt.

The sanitation of Manaus accompanied Ribeiro's embellishment of his capital. Most Brazilian cities suffered from yellow fever and other diseases facilitated by untreated sewage and garbage in the streets. Equatorial Manaus, extremely hot the entire year, its streets filled with mud and garbage surrounded by large volumes of stagnant water, discouraged the immigration of people from milder, healthier climates and provoked excessive rates of mortality among its residents. While the wealthier residents of contemporary Rio de Janeiro could at least flee to the mountains during the summer, Manaus had summer all year and no hills in the vicinity. Ribeiro felt that his landfills decreased the incidence of yellow fever and malaria, and he provided statistics in his gubernatorial report of 1894 that indicated that landfills caused deaths to decline that year⁸⁰. He began work on a modern sewage system but did not complete this project during his administration, to his great disappointment. In his last report as governor, in 1896, Ribeiro demonstrated the need for a central garbage incineration plant⁸¹ as currently the residents of Manaus disposed of their garbage in vacant lots. Ribeiro's improvements in fever eradication, waste disposal, and sewage management, allied with his beautification of the parks, helped consolidate a new type of more cosmopolitan society, led by the rubber lords, from which the mass of the population continued excluded⁸².

In Ribeiro's time, Manaus connected to the rest of Brazil only by river. He supported the construction of an underwater cable completed on February 10, 1896, during his last months in office⁸³.

To populate this city, Ribeiro obtained from the State Assembly on September 21, 1892, a law authorizing the government to purchase third class tickets for artisans wishing to move to Manaus from anywhere in Brazil or abroad. Those who could not find work immediately upon arrival would receive lodgings and two milreis per day for one month at the state's expense. After the national legislature authorized the immigration of Asians in October of 1892, Ribeiro actively promoted immigration from China and Japan⁸⁴.

⁷⁸ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1893 p 12-15.

⁷⁹ Benjamin Constant Institute, the offices of the *Diário Oficial*, and some 20 schools *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1896, p 9-10.

⁸⁰ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1894, p. 19.

⁸¹ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1896, p. 7-8

⁸² Daou, *A cidade, o teatro*.

⁸³ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1896, p 30.

⁸⁴ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1893 p 10.

Ribeiro and his contemporaries expected Asian immigrants to go into agriculture rather than extraction, thereby decreasing the state's dependence upon imported foodstuffs⁸⁵.

Gatherers of latex came from the Northeast rather than from abroad. Colonel Fontenelle, the governor of Ceara, complained repeatedly of the lack of workers in his state in consequence of the exodus to the Amazon: "The creeks of the Amazon have become cemeteries," he denounced⁸⁶. Exploitation of the rubber gatherers has been dealt with extensively in the literature⁸⁷. The men from Ceara voted with their feet preferring the exploitation and debt peonage of the Amazonian states to starvation in their own. Ribeiro wished to give the northeasterners the chance to own their land and become farmers⁸⁸ but lacked both the financial credit and the fertile land to do so. Governor Lieutenant Colonel Lauro Sodre of Pará agreed, lamenting that immigrants from the northeast as well as local laborers preferred gathering latex to working in agriculture or industry⁸⁹. Under the circumstances, work in rubber extraction proved to be the lesser evil for these immigrants.

9. The "Rocket Congress" and the Succession of Eduardo Ribeiro

While Ribeiro achieved considerable results in his program for Amazonas, his leader in Rio fared less brilliantly, beginning well but then experiencing momentous setbacks. In April of 1892, Peixoto withstood a major military-civilian uprising, led by 13 general officers allied to General Fonseca, abetted by prominent politicians and bankers who had benefitted from the Encilhamento. On this occasion, Ximeno de Villeroy played a key role passing a motion in the Military Club in favor of the vice president against the 13 generals⁹⁰. Once this threat of reaction passed, there followed the productive period of Peixoto's administration, lasting until April of 1893. The vice president, aided by Finance Minister Lieutenant Colonel Serzedelo Correa, contained the inflation and financial mismanagement of the Encilhamento, achieving a modest recovery in the value of the Brazilian currency. The vice president and his minister also succeeded in providing a large loan to industry, protective tariffs, and a major immigration law.

At the end of April 1893, both Serzedelo Correa and Admiral Custodio de Melo, the navy minister, resigned in protest against Peixoto's excess expenditures to aid Governor Julio de Castilhos in the civil war in Rio Grande do Sul. While it is obviously the role of the central government to uphold legitimate state governments, Castilhos, in office thanks to appointment by Peixoto, attacked the persons and properties of his political rivals with a violence that provoked a defense in kind. Many, including Peixoto's important allies from São Paulo, advocated a negotiated peace between Castilhos and his enemies. The vice president chose to back Castilhos with all his power, thus ending any hope of further reforms as all the central government's other departments saw their resources curtailed to finance the war⁹¹. The situation further deteriorated in September, when Admiral Custodio de Melo led the fleet in rebellion and joined with Castilhos' enemies in Rio Grande do Sul. Although he won his war, Peixoto achieved no additional reforms. His record regarding education and sanitation yielded little to commemorate while the brutality of his soldiers left a bitter memory, as evidenced by Lima Barreto's classic novel, *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma*.

Peixoto hoped to elect his successor as president and talked both with Castilhos and Lauro Sodre, governor of Para⁹². Neither man felt he had sufficient support among the state elites to oppose the PRP, in the person of Prudente de Moraes, president of Congress during and after the Constituent Assembly. The election held

⁸⁵ Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*, p. 138-148.

⁸⁶ *Mensagem do Governador*, Ceara, 1893, p.14. Also *Mensagem*, Ceara, 1894, p.7.

⁸⁷ See more: Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, and Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*.

⁸⁸ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1893, p. 9-10.

⁸⁹ *Mensagem do Governador*, Pará, 1897, p 24.

⁹⁰ *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 8, 1892.

⁹¹ Schulz, *O Exército na Política*, p 200-203.

⁹² Schulz, *O Exército na Política*, p. 204.

on March 1, 1894, with the naval revolt still in progress, duly returned Morais. On November 15, Peixoto reluctantly turned power over to the first civilian president –without bothering to attend the inauguration ceremonies. The following July, Peixoto, the “Iron Marshal,” passed away, depriving the politically active military officers of their foremost leader. Note that neither Peixoto nor Benjamin Constant, deceased in January 1891, had taken advantage of their offices to enrich themselves.

President Morais negotiated a peace in Rio Grande do Sul during his first year in office and resumed Peixoto’s original fiscal conservatism, which the general had abandoned after April 1893 to finance Castilhos’ war. The São Paulo politician also continued the immigration subsidies which favored his home state. Industry and education proved to be much lower priorities for the civilian government than they had been under the Iron Marshal.

Of the officers elected governors in 1892, only Ribeiro and Lauro Sodre of Para stand out for their achievements regarding education and public works⁹³. These two also enjoyed the greatest revenues thanks to the rubber boom⁹⁴. They both prided themselves that their expenses on education and infrastructure did not prevent them from repaying their states’ debts contracted under the monarchy⁹⁵. Colonel Fontenelle of Ceara, another one of Benjamin Constant’s disciples, although dismayed to find that only 7000 of the 130,000 school age children of his state attended primary school, actually wanted to abolish the state secondary school⁹⁶. Captain Alexandre Barbosa Lima, governor of the traditionally powerful state of Pernambuco, spent his energies fending off oligarchic resistance which came close to deposing him on more than one occasion. Like Ribeiro and Sodre, Barbosa Lima named an institution for Benjamin Constant and valued education and industry. He advanced the construction of a state theater which performed concerts but not operas. But, generally, Barbosa Lima’s reports record frustration on his inability to implement the reformist agenda⁹⁷. He went on, as a federal deputy, to participate in the opposition to President Morais as did Lauro Sodre who became a senator and the opposition candidate for president in 1898⁹⁸. The other military governors all displayed some initiatives regarding education, sanitation, and public works, including the construction of state theaters (although only Para and Amazonas had monumental opera houses). Their reports reflect much less actually accomplished.

The ability to collaborate with civilian politicians to promote measures of mutual interest, like the Opera House, proved essential for his success. Like many of his fellow governors, Ribeiro had to face serious events of armed conflict, as he did in December of 1892 and February of 1893⁹⁹. While the National Party systematically opposed Ribeiro from the beginning of his term, the governor enjoyed the backing of the Moreiras and their Democratic Party for more than half of his period in office. Once Peixoto left office, Ribeiro became more vulnerable. In February of 1895, a scant three months after Prudente de Morais became president, the governing party in Amazonas divided into two factions with Ribeiro’s friends, including two of the three senators and several deputies, leaving to form the Federal Republican Party (PRF) while the Moreiras, with Senator Sarmento and several federal deputies, retained control of the Democratic Party, taking it into opposition. The two groups bitterly disputed government contracts¹⁰⁰. Ribeiro’s newly formed PRF prepared to nominate Senator Manoel Francisco Machado, Baron of Solimões, for governor. Machado, the Liberal governor of Amazonas deposed by the Republic had entered the Democratic Party upon its foundation. The third senator, Jose da Costa Azevedo, Admiral Baron of Ladario, also joined Ribeiro’s PRF. This gentleman had enjoyed a moment of national fame when, as minister of the navy, he had fired the only

⁹³ Lauro Sodre deserves more attention from historians than he has so far received. In his *Crenças e Opiniões*, 433-434, he notes his ability to fund education with private donations, an amazing accomplishment at this time.

⁹⁴ The authors have perused the governors’ reports from the nine states that had military governors and only Sodre compares with Ribeiro in terms of dedication to education and infrastructure. Of the nine officer governors, two, those of Maranhão and Santa Catarina, survived but one year in power. Captain Gabino Besouro of Alagoas made a promising beginning, taking advantage of the relative prosperity of his cotton and sugar exporting state, but lasted only two years before the traditional oligarchy drove him out. The other governors, of Piauí, Ceara, Paraíba, and Pernambuco achieved little although they all completed their terms.

⁹⁵ *Mensagem do Governador*, Para, 1893, p. 13 and 1896, p. 62. In *Contra a Calúnia*, p. 3, Ribeiro mentions debt payments as a priority. Peixoto’s followers favored balanced budgets and manageable debt while opposing inflation.

⁹⁶ *Mensagem do Governador*, Ceará, 1893, p. 11 and 1894, p. 18.

⁹⁷ *Mensagem do Governador*, Pernambuco, 1893, p. 28 and 1894, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Schulz, *O Exército na Política*, p. 220-223.

⁹⁹ *Mensagem do Governador*, Amazonas, 1893, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Mesquita, *La Belle Vitrine*, p. 339.

shot – at General Fonseca – made in defense of the monarchy on the day in Rio that the republican coup overthrew the emperor. The leadership of the PRF also included Fileto Pires Ferreira, a young Positivist military engineer.¹⁰¹ As Villeroy had made Ribeiro his right arm in the administration of Amazonas in 1890, so Ribeiro appointed Ferreira in 1892 as his secretary of government, the most powerful position at his disposal. The following year, Ferreira left this post after having himself elected to the national Chamber of Deputies.

The unity of the PRF lasted only to August of 1895, six months after its formation. Ladario and Machado broke with Ribeiro who then decided to nominate Ferreira as his successor in the elections to be held the following March. The campaign turned ugly as the incumbent's rivals used racism against him labelling his administration as “dark, obscure, and black”¹⁰² Racial slurs against Ribeiro appeared regularly in the opposition press and speeches. His enemies correctly observed that Ribeiro had embarked on his political career as a poor officer and had grown wealthy while in office. Senator Ladario accused him of accumulating a fortune outside of Brazil, which Ribeiro violently denied¹⁰³. The opposition newspaper, *O Amazonas*, attacked Ribeiro repeatedly for his color, his poverty in childhood, and his birth to a single mother; the nineteenth century world considered those born out of wedlock as innately inferior¹⁰⁴. Ribeiro's organ, *A Federação*, replied that the governor had nothing to be ashamed of and praised him as an individual who had been able to rise from humble circumstances¹⁰⁵.

During this period in Brazilian history, incumbent governors enjoyed immense power to control the elections so that, even with the combined opposition of the Moreiras and all three senators, Ladario, Machado, and Sarmento, Ferreira won the contest held on March 25, 1896. The losers claimed fraud, so Ribeiro scheduled an extraordinary meeting of the State Assembly for July 9 to ratify the results of this ballot. Conventionally, the meetings of the Assembly commenced at noon when a rocket went off for all the center of town to hear. On this date Ribeiro's and Ferreira's partisans entered the assembly two hours earlier. The rocket duly sounded off at this time catching the opposition by surprise and away from the building. Quickly Ferreira's friends confirmed that he had won with 5945 votes while his vice governor, Major Jose Cardoso Ramalho Junior, received 5859 votes. These men assumed office two weeks later. Due to the anticipation of the rocket, this event came to be known as the “Rocket Election”¹⁰⁶.

Clearly Ribeiro retained, by this time, the support of only a minority of the political elite. This election, as well as his earlier substitution of Villeroy as governor, constitute two examples of Ribeiro's willingness to violate the letter of the law. Like his leader, Floriano Peixoto, Ribeiro had no compunction concerning the use of force. Ribeiro's other public defect, his personal enrichment, became grounds for attack at this moment¹⁰⁷. In this respect, Ribeiro fell short of Peixoto's example; the latter retired from the presidency without becoming a wealthy man.

10. A Political Throat Slitting

Ferreira continued Ribeiro's policies, inaugurating the still not quite finished Opera House on the last day of 1896. At his first address to the state assembly, early the following year, Ferreira praised his predecessor especially for his building and embellishment of the capital. The rubber boom provided the new governor with the means to go on building while he endeavored to diversify a state economy which remained dependent

¹⁰¹ Lins, *História do Positivismo no Brasil*, p.295-96.

¹⁰² Mesquita, “La Belle Vitrine”, p. 293-95.

¹⁰³ Mesquita, *La Belle Vitrine*, p 289.

¹⁰⁴ Mesquita, p. 293-95.

¹⁰⁵ *A Federação*, 23 de abril de 1896.

¹⁰⁶ Tavares Neto, *A república no Amazonas*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ *O Amazonas*, July 25, 1896.

on this one product¹⁰⁸.

The day before he inaugurated the Opera, Ferreira presided over the senatorial elections to fill the seat held by Ladario. Ribeiro went against Jonathas Pedrosa, leader of the National Party and long-time adversary. Ferreira declared Ribeiro the victor. When time came for the next session of Congress, the new senator sailed for Rio de Janeiro to assume his seat. He arrived in May of 1897, an extremely turbulent moment. Two months earlier, President Prudente de Moraes had returned from his convalescence to take power back from his vice president, Manoel Vitorino Pereira, who had governed against him in his absence. That same month, news arrived that a large military expedition had been defeated by supposed monarchists from the town of Canudos in the northeastern state of Bahia. Radical republican followers of the deceased General Floriano Peixoto demonstrated in the street physically attacking those accused of monarchism. Prudente de Moraes, forced to prove his republicanism, organized an army of 4000 men commanded by one of Peixoto's best known partisans to conquer Canudos. While the troops assembled, precisely in May, Moraes quashed a rebellion at the Military Academy of Rio and expelled many of its students. The next month, as the army set forth for Canudos, Moraes, who had patiently assembled a coalition among the governors of the major states, won control over congress replacing an adversary as president of the Chamber of Deputies with an individual loyal to himself. From this point to the end of the Old Republic in 1930, the legislature remained subservient to the executive¹⁰⁹.

The general practice at this time called for the legislature to seat those individuals elected by their governors' machines, as long as the governors supported the president. Often two rival candidates for office, both claiming to be winners, appeared before the "Verification Committee" of their respective chambers, leaving the decision to this committee. Ladario, still sitting in the Senate, along with Ribeiro's other enemies in that house, Machado and Sarmiento, wanted Ribeiro excluded from the Senate due to their differences in local politics while President Prudente de Moraes did not wish to seat the only officer governor able to elect a military officer as his successor. Accordingly, the Verification Committee selected Jonathas Pedrosa as the senator from Amazonas, for a term beginning in 1898. In the slang of the time, Ribeiro had his throat slit. Unusually, although Ribeiro enjoyed the backing of the incumbent governor, Ferreira, national political forces removed him from the Senate.

Extremely disappointed, Ribeiro wrote *Contra a Calunia*, his defense against enemies in the Senate and at home. Returning to Manaus, he won election as a state deputy on November 15. On July 9 of the following year, after Ferreira began his leave of absence, the state assemblymen elected Ribeiro as their president in the unicameral legislature. Ribeiro maintained himself as a politician and never returned to active military service¹¹⁰.

On April 4, 1898, for reasons of health, Ferreira took a leave of absence from the governorship, and on August 1, in a letter from Paris, he resigned this post. In fact, Ferreira declared this letter a forgery, blaming Ribeiro, now president of the State Assembly, from whom he had become estranged, but Ferreira never managed to regain office¹¹¹. Major Ramalho, the vice governor, served out the rest of Ferreira's term.¹¹² No longer the king, Ribeiro became the kingmaker.

His period as local boss witnessed Ribeiro's physical decline. After having his political throat slit in May of 1897, Ribeiro developed physical and psychological disturbances that affected his ability to pursue his political career. Furthermore, even though he had built up a following in the state, Ribeiro had lost a major source of strength with the retirement and death of Peixoto in 1895 and the defeat of the military radicals in 1897. Like the hero of Aluisio de Azevedo's *OMulato*, Ribeiro must have felt loneliness after leaving the governor's mansion and having his dream to sit in the Senate shattered. He never married, and his mother and sister resided in São Luis. Many who had adulated him while in office, shunned him once he no longer held power. Both his color and his humble origins were remembered as parts of society turned their backs

¹⁰⁸ Mesquita, *La Belle Vitrine*, p 345.

¹⁰⁹ Schulz, *O Exército na Política*, chapter 11.

¹¹⁰ Braga, *Eduardo Ribeiro vida e obra*.

¹¹¹ Mesquita, "La Belle Vitrine", p. 350.

¹¹² Mesquita, p. 299

on him. We have seen that once he became governor, his portraits tended to “whiten” literally while most of his relations tended to treat him as white. But during the succession struggle and after he left office, his opponents turned nasty, continually utilizing his race as well as his birth to a single mother to attack him¹¹³.

11. Mysterious Death

Until October of 1899, despite his ailments, Ribeiro remained a force in Amazonas politics as president of the Assembly and editor of *A Federação*¹¹⁴. That month, he passed the editorship to Silverio Nery, soon to be his party’s successful candidate for governor. By March of 1900, Ribeiro’s medical problems, quite possibly syphilis¹¹⁵, made him travel to Europe in search of relief. When he returned early in September, some in Manaus thought his health had been restored. But on October 14, friends found him dead in his estate on the outskirts of the city. Generally, historians believe that he hung himself, as he apparently had given his friends concern in this regard, yet assassination cannot be entirely discarded. Over a century after this event, it remains a mystery¹¹⁶.

Silverio Nery, the new civilian governor, placed streetcars at the public’s disposal to take mourners to the cemetery. Large numbers attended Ribeiro’s funeral attesting to his popularity among the citizens of Manaus who recognized his transformation of their city. Tributes came in from various sectors and political groupings within the state. Thus, ended prematurely the life of one of Brazil’s greatest administrators remembered to this day by the beautiful Opera House in the middle of the jungle.

12. Concluding Remarks

Looking at Ribeiro’s life in terms of the big history, three aspects stand out: 1) Ribeiro’s ability to reach the highest political office despite his condition as a colored man in the nineteenth century world, 2) Ribeiro’s achievements as a military officer partisan of Generals Benjamin Constant and Floriano Peixoto, and 3) Ribeiro’s initiatives as a regional governor within the structure of the Brazilian Republic. Starting with the third aspect, the fiscal organization of the first Brazilian Republic left export taxes to the states. A well-intentioned governor could avail himself of these funds to build infrastructure and promote education. Ribeiro and his friend, Governor Lieutenant Colonel Lauro Sodre of Para, prove progress could be made. Considering the military aspect of Ribeiro’s career, we observe that reformers within the officer corps of the army consistently, since the 1850s, favored abolition, immigration, industrialization, transportation, sanitation, and education. We have seen that officers played a decisive role in national politics beginning during the abolitionist campaign of the 1880s and increasing in the early years of the Republic. Ribeiro’s administration of Amazonas represents, with that of Lauro Sodre, one of the two most successful state governments led by officers in terms of improvements accomplished.

Perhaps of greatest significance to this study, Ribeiro showed that an afro descendant could reach the pinnacle of Brazilian politics. He succeeded in entering the secondary school of his city, won a place at the military academy in Rio, became a military engineer and an officer, and finally rose to become governor. In office, he suffered racial attacks, and certainly he encountered difficulties at all stages of his life due to the color of his skin. Yet, he did succeed.

¹¹³ *O Amazonas*, July 25, 1896, and May 17, 1898, as examples.

¹¹⁴ *A Federação*, October 4-6, 1899.

¹¹⁵ Civil suit brought by José Paulo Macedo de Bragança (Ribeiro’s physician) against Florinda Maria da Conceição, Ribeiro’s mother and heir in 1901 at the Civil Court of Manaus. This document, which discusses Ribeiro’s health in his last year, is in the Arquivo Geral do Tribunal de Justiça do Estado do Amazonas.

¹¹⁶ For further details on the context of the death, funeral rites, and burial of Eduardo Ribeiro see: Matos, “O Amazonas de luto”.

In this article, we have hoped to reconstruct the career of Eduardo Ribeiro within the social and racial environments that he encountered in making his choices and formulating his goals. We wish to call the attention of readers, both inside and outside Brazil, to Ribeiro, a figure who has so far not received his rightful place in history. We also hope to generate further debate on Ribeiro's position as an iconic black who broke through the barriers to achieve power in the racist society of post-abolitionary Brazil. Can he be considered an exception that proves the rule, or did he form part of a group of blacks, whom recent research has come to recognize, that prevailed despite Social Darwinist views of race explaining why they could not do so?

We have sought to demonstrate that in a society permeated with racism, social mobility could be achieved through education and a military career. We have noted that Ribeiro could break into the intellectual circles of his native São Luis through contact with his contemporaries Manoel de Bethencourt and Aluisio de Azevedo. Together with these men, Ribeiro contributed to the newspaper *O Pensador*, which helped frame his thinking and provided him with notoriety. Such opportunities came the way of few contemporary young men of color. His high school studies at this time prepared him for the entrance examination of the military academy which in turn opened up the future for him. He distinguished himself at the academy and remained out of trouble. Luck brought him to Amazonas during the rubber boom where fortunes could be acquired more easily than most other areas of the country. Good political abilities and his military engineering education then took him to the top, at what psychological cost, we still do not know.

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